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AUTHOR	Bar-Lev, Zev
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ABSTRACT

This article presents an output-printed, lexically-based communicative teaching method. Specially designed to impart spontaneous speaking abilities for special students, it is a possible solution to broader problems of foreign language teaching. It is based on the assumption that acquisition-sequence is crucial to successful classroom study, but an acquisition-sequence distinct from that of first language (L1), and in fact best refined in the second language (L2) classroom. It uses strict incrementation, with mostly asymmetric sequencing and also a variety of shortcuts, to ensure easy ways to say as much as possible, or optimal errors in cases where (as is inevitable) the learner cannot access the exact form while speaking. The class progresses mostly in small-group study through four study-steps per lesson, covering an average of two speaking lessons per class-hour. The study-steps ensure successful study of vocabulary and patterns, finally forcing spontaneous speech. Special innovations are also used to teach skip-comprehension (comprehension when less than 50 percent of the text consists of known words). Samples from a mini-course are appended. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/SM)

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AN "HERETICAL" METHOD FOR TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ZEV BAR-LEV, San Diego State University

This paper was presented at the 2002 TEXFLEC Conference

This article presents an output-printed, lexically-based communicative teaching method. Specially designed to impart spontaneous speaking abilities for special students, etc., it is a possible solution to broader problems of foreign-language teaching. It is based on the assumption that acquisition-sequence is crucial to successful classroom-study — but an acquisition-sequence distinct from that of L1, and in fact best refined in the L2 classroom. It uses strict incrementation, with mostly ASYMMETRIC sequencing; and also a variety of SHORTCUTS, to ensure easy ways to say as much as possible, or OPTIMAL ERRORS, in cases where (as is inevitable) the learner cannot access the exact form while speaking.

The class progresses mostly in small-group study through four Study-Steps per lesson, covering an average of two speaking lessons per class-hour. The Study-Steps ensure successful study of vocabulary and patterns, finally forcing spontaneous speech. · Special innovations are also used to teach skip-comprehension (comprehension when less than 50% of the text consists of known words). Teachers are here invited to do their own classroom experiments, using as few as two weeks of SILL before regular elementary curriculum, or applying INTERMEDIATE HANDOUTS.

INTRODUCTION

The "heretical" method to be outlined here is called "Sheltered Initiation Language Learning" (SILL): Both the name and the characterization go back to a review (generally positive!) of the method (Blair, in Celce-Murcia 1991), which said: "Its startling methodological assumptions, instructional procedures, and degree of success present a bold challenge to prevalent language acquisition theory. Future theories of formal language learning will have to account for the manifest success of SILL." It has been applied in the form of "mini-courses" of a half college-semester of study, with semester courses under development now, and a three-semester course taught in one language

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(Hebrew) for over a decade. (Hebrew is a very challenging language, containing larger versions of the bigger problems of the more familiar languages, as well as special ones of its own.)

It was designed primarily to allow SPONTANEOUS SPEAKING ABILITIES (speaking abilities that are CONFIDENT, CONTINUOUS, CREATIVE, and COMPREHENSIBLE), especially under challenging circumstances: special-needs students (Learning Disabled, phobic, busy), LCTLs (Less Commonly Taught Languages), and even distance learning. Indeed it might be asked of teachers, even of Spanish, how many of their students, after the regular foreign-language requirement of three or four semesters, actually willingly use their foreign language in their daily lives. Certainly many students of Spanish in "top" programs make many of the same complaints that students have always made: too little speaking ability — and too much grammar.

On one occasion a researcher asked whether a technique designed to make results of classroom exercises better wouldn't delay the authentic use of the foreign language, and whether she would propose that the foreign-language requirement be stretched to ten years, since it makes no sense not to provide actually usable abilities within the time that most students actually study. The researcher responded matter-of-factly: Couldn't you say the same about all curriculum? SILL does everything possible to provide authentic language-abilities, usable abilities, within whatever time is available. In fact, one of its most heretical aspects is that it puts authentic use of language first (ignoring authenticity of text as such): Students speak independently (not via "pre-fab" conversations) from the first day of class, and their very first reading (and listening) comprehension exercises are done without glossaries.

Teachers will naturally wonder how such a strange method (the nickname "SILLy" has thus been used for it), even in the (no doubt unlikely) event that it has any advantages, can be integrated into mainstream curriculum. The answer is a simple one: The SILL claim is that it is especially useful as an initial method. As little as a few weeks (even two, although preferably 5-6) devoted exclusively to it at the beginning of study will produce benefits for students' abilities as regards not only speaking, but also for further study. SILL is specially strong on providing speaking confidence and ability to integrate needed grammar into speaking — including, for example, techniques for vocabulary

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study that could well be used by SILL-graduates to fill this gap in ordinary curriculum. While, of course, it is best to follow a SILL curriculum for as long as possible, it is very much better to follow it even for a few weeks and then to mainstream than not to follow it at all. Indeed, this article is intended, inter alia, to invite experimentation: Teachers might consider following up with such an experiment, following some of the suggestions given below.

BACKGROUND IN ACQUISITION THEORY

The main goal and assumption behind Sheltered Initiation Language Learning are the same as behind most or all acquisition-oriented (= "communicative") foreign-language teaching: the goal of spontaneous language-abilities, and the assumption of a natural sequence of acquisition of linguistic structures in acquisition. However, SILL makes a deviation from Natural Approach and other "input"-based methods in the use made of this assumption of a natural sequence.

Let us note a sort of contradiction in modern second-language acquisition, between acquisition theory and teaching. Certainly this contradiction is notable in the history of Natural Approach: In the beginning it was presented as a more or less completely "agrammatical" method, with students studying grammar optionally on their own; but at the University of California at San Diego in the program designed by Tracy Terrell, two out of five weekly lessons are devoted to grammar lessons. (There is a similar split in the way the originally comprehension-based method, accommodating a "Silent Period" of up to six months, gave way to initial speaking lessons to allow classroom communication.)

As acquisition theorists, we tend to speak positively about natural acquisition, including L1 children with their fascinating creative phonology, syntax, and lexicon, and Turkish guest-workers; but as language teachers, few of us would tolerate such poor speech from our students (and we would probably not last long as teachers if we did). Can anyone really imagine a first-semester French student saying Mwa do-do "Me sleep," or a Spanish student saying yo teta "I bottle" or Papi memé "Daddy sleep" while his teacher looked on like a proud parent? Modern teachers of these languages, no matter how tolerant, cringe at far milder errors.

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"Natural" L2 acquirers often begin with the imperative, although it is a highly marked form: It sounds better to overuse the indicative than the imperative. (See discussion of SHORTCUTS below.)

Although we may officially believe in "natural acquisition," almost all of us manage somehow to teach vast amounts of grammar — and to work towards a far more accurate production than we often hear from "natural" L2 acquirers. One could even argue that the real goal of foreign-language teaching is rarely communicative competence as such, but communicative competence within the GOAL — Grammar, Orthography, And Lexicon — as expressed in the actual terminal examinations.

A similar contradiction exists between the assumption of a natural sequence, and the place of grammar in the class. While assuming a natural sequence, NA refuses to build the assumed acquisition-sequence into curriculum, believing that it must be acquired from "authentic" teacher-talk. At the same time, any textbook must contain some acquisition-sequence, in the form of an ordered sequence of grammatical topics (hopefully with exercises). NA textbooks are no exception. Should textbook-authors close their eyes when arranging these lessons, as if grammar were a Victorian taboo? To let the grammar topics emerge from situational topics is to follow the Audio-Lingual model. (This is what is done, and modern Communicative Language Teaching is very little removed from ALM in basic ways.)

In any case, it is the claim, from the perspective of SILL, that mainstream curriculum has greatly neglected the whole issue of grammatical explanation — and indeed of linguistic structure generally (with a major exception, to be noted below). SILL, while acquisition focused and communicatively oriented, focuses critically on issues of the sequencing and presentation of structures — grammatical, phonological/orthographic, and lexical.

It is widely assumed that L1 and L2 acquisition are parallel. The counter-claim has been argued elsewhere (bar-Lev 1966a), based on the published data and observations — observing that even in acquisition, adults are more grammatically aware and less flexible. Thus,they do not usually (if ever) go through acquisition sequences like

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went > goed > went that are typical of L1, much less use the kinds of structures that are typical of children.

To this we can add that, while immersion is a viable method to use with children for several hours a day, it is not at all so applicable to adults studying one hour a day. While an occasional teacher may be able to master both teacher-talk and classroom interaction successfully enough to induce acquisition in some students, other students are likely to be confused and/or intimidated, especially with more typical teachers. (Spanish teachers may get a week or two of orientation — perhaps or perhaps not enough to create good communicative teachers, but in LCTLs most teachers receive little or no training at all. A full course in teaching methods is rarely required before beginning to teach, even in EFL. Are we naive enough to think that a teacher can be "naturally" inspire the needed participation, especially with existing textbooks? Calls for teacher to free themselves from dependence on a textbook are rather unrealistic given the present levels of training.)

SILL is based on the OPTIMAL ACQUISITION SEQUENCE — but without the assumption that L1 and L2 are identical. Nor is it here assumed that the optimal L2 sequence can be derived by analysis of immersion speakers (such as Turkish guest-workers). And of course SILL includes languages for which the acquisition literature is minuscule or non-existent.

In SILL, the optimal L2 acquisition sequence may be initially approximated by what is known about L1 acquisition, in general or in specifics — but it is derived, ultimately, from classroom experimentation with the curriculum itself. SILL provides, in fact, a new model of classroom research — however, one which depends crucially on an understanding of it as a method: A pair of experiments to be mentioned below were done within this framework, showing crucial differences between L2 and L1 acquisition, albeit within the framework of SILL, which, as noted, is not immersion as such.

A good example of the "heretical" nature of the SILL approach involves the use of writing. An immersion-oriented methodologist is likely to think that any use of writing (whether standard spelling or some other, e.g. a phonemic spelling) is a distraction, a diversion from acquisition. (Others, on the other hand, might argue that learners with a visual "learning style" should not be forced to speak at all.) However, it seems obvious

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that most adults (perhaps anyone over 13) is, whether by maturation or education, visually oriented; even L1 illiterates (including L1 Chinese etc.) learning English often ask to see (and try to practice) how English words are written. When brief immersion lessons in Hebrew or Arabic are given to immersion teachers of Spanish, they can be seen quickly escaping from the principles of immersion that they impose on their students: They try to write down words in some sort of phonetic spelling (as well as asking each other for help in English).

In line with the goal of SILL, to teach spontaneous speaking abilities with whatever means are available, SILL provides phonemic spellings for all new words. In languages with ordinary spellings, this involves adding diacritics, etc., to the ordinary spelling, e.g. Spanish queso is spelled with a small, light u and a s superscript above the s, to prevent any student from thinking, even for an instant, that the word is pronounced kweezo. Some students can utilize such helps better than others, but at least an incorrect pronunciation is prevented; a second device turns out to be even more helpful in ensuring correct pronunciation from the beginning (see below). But at least learners are not forced into an artificial "blindness" by an assumed (but unproved) analogy with L1 learners. (Conversely, all SILL learners are forced, via special exercises, to overcome their bashfulness from the first moment of study. since, whatever the learner's "learning style," the "style" of the speaking-skill itself makes its own demands. SILL, instead of "lowering" the affective filter, breaks through with shouting exercises.)

Overview of Method.

A teacher can create steps towards helping students learn a langauge, but it is worth wondering whether the teacher can create the conditions needed for full acquisition to take place for most students, especially within a three- or four-semester language requirement. If not, then have we really progressed very much beyond traditional courses, which provided explicit knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but required additional time to produce proficient speakers who understood language in real situations.

SILL attempts to provide authentic language abilities, i.e. usable abilities, within whatever time is available. This first of all means the ability to speak, as noted;

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secondarily it includes the ability to comprehend (aurally and in writing), as will be discussed briefly at the end.

The primary distinguishing feature of SILL is its emphasis on output. Its lesson structure is therefore lexical: Students are not presented with unanalyzed input, or even with sample conversations, as primary material for study, but rather simple lists of words, associated with grammatical patterns (first sentence-patterns, later inflectional patterns). The curriculum itself is simply the sequence of vocabulary and linguistic structures. Just one single sample of each pattern is given with each lesson, to ensure that the burden of creating discourse and thus of creativity is shifted from the curriculum to the student.

SPEAKING LESSONS

Sample lessons can be found at the first link on the web-site (http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/linguist/zevbar-lev.html). A single sample lesson is provided in the appendix here for convenience, along with the vocabulary covered in the mini-course exemplified. Each lesson consists of about 5 words, along with a single sample sentence. The first lesson as shown typically exemplifies the pattern X, please! with food-words (masculine in most languages). The second lesson on the web-site (generally the third lesson in an SILL curriculum) typically introduces narrative sentences, of the form The + person (male) + verb (intransitive). The third lesson on the web-site (generally the beginning of the second unit in SILL) introduces the first morphological pattern, often (as in Spanish) the pronoun "I" with its regular ending.

Each lesson takes about 15-20 minutes. Four or five constitute a unit that takes abouta week to complete. The narrative pattern quickly grows with the addition of objects and other complements, as well as more verbs and subjects. The third unit typically begins by presenting females, with feminine places and things then gradually introduced. (SILL starts with masculines in the Romance and Slavic languages, but feminines in German and Yiddish because these are simpler.) Unit D is often the unit to introduce "is, am, are."

The overriding methodological assumption behind any SILL curriculum is that of an OPTIMAL SEQUENCE of vocabulary and structures (syntactic, morphological, and phonological/orthographic). Classroom research, both formal and informal, are of primary

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importance. For example, at one point, a more L1-like ordering of verb-morphology was tried, by presenting the copula (in the main forms of the present tense) earlier than regular verbs. The result was a rapid decline in accuracy (which was easily counted, as well as obvious in their speech), as students began using copulas before verbs in Romance and Germanic languages (yo soy canta, ich bin singe) — an obvious transfer from English.

At the same time, teaching Farsi to two groups revealed that the copula and "have" must precede regular verbs in this language: The copula and "have" are the only two verbs that don't take the present-tense prefix mi- in Farsi, and it is better to introduce this prefix after presenting basic conjugation. Otherwise, learners have more trouble with the conjugation itself, as well as overextending mi-. These two experiments were referred to above, as showing the contrast between L1 and L2 acquisition in the present method.

SEQUENCING PRINCIPLES.

In general, reason has been found to invoke three different ordering principles, two of them ASYMMETRIC. Asymmetric ordering is similar to the "one at a time" principle (Lee & vanPatten 1995), but more far-reaching; for example, Lee & vanPatten do not introduce genders asymmetrically as SILL does (as noted earlier).

The primary asymmetric ordering is UNMARKED>MARKED, in which the more neutral, more general form is presented first, thus MASCULINE>FEMININE, and (for verbs in Romance languages) 3SG>1SG. Sometimes judgment is required to determine which is the unmarked form; the notion of OPTIMAL ERROR in this context, e.g. German (ich) singe "[I] sing" is chosen as unmarked because *er singe "he sing" sounds better than **ich singt "I sings" (the latter being a typical error in L2 Natural Approach, although not in L1 German acquisition). Generally, the goal is to mitigate for the predominance of optimal errors over non-optimal errors, e.g. *yo va is preferable to **él voy.

The opposite asymmetric order is available in special circumstances. For example, while está clearly "marked" vis-à-vis es, it is presented first in SILL. It is a riskier order, but useful in such special circumstances, to ensure greater accuracy. Whether *Yo soy en la oficina with the wrong copula is comprehensible is not crucial in SILL: The crucial fact is that considerable accuracy with estar/ser is possible with little effort (see next paragraph for an additional reason for this).

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Symmetric ordering is also usable under special circumstances, to enhance accuracy; for example it is used in Hebrew for singular "you," in masculine and feminine forms, so as to mitigate in favor of neither being overgeneralized (although of course students will still make mistakes with this).

All these ordering are examples of the EXTREME INCREMENTATION demanded by SILL. Any grammatical principle is allowed in the mini-course — as long as it can be expressed in a short sentence, and practiced extensively in speaking. One grammar-principle (or sometimes two) is allowed per unit, since it is only at this rate that most students can acquire it.

The early presentation of está is helped by another important teaching-technique: INNOVATIVE TRANSLATION. It is translated when presented as "is located," effectively preventing learners from overgeneralizing to its meaning as "is." The use of estar before certain adjectives is deferred for late in the first semester, just as, in general, different uses of any structure are separated for the sake of student comfort and competence, which happens to conform to L1 acquisition. It is not assumed that all students will master all subteleties: Some may simply resist regarding muerto as a "temporary" condition.

In drafts for masters theses, one sees L2 speakers of English having great difficulty mastering the/a: The Japanese have most trouble, while Slavs seem to master most but not all of the distinction. This is also a phenomenon where innovative translation can solve the problem far more than existing curricula do: the is translated as "this/that," and a is translated as "one." This simple technique obviates the basic confusion, and also prevents a typical error of Semitic-language speakers, namely using a with plural nouns. But this does not mean that L2 speakers of English can ever master all of the layers of usage, some of which might be difficult for a native speaker not acquainted with the specific domain of the thesis.

Study-Steps.

In each lesson, learners go through 3 special exercises (called "Study-Steps 2-4"): (2) Word-Quiz, in which the teacher (or a rotating student) quizzes students in vocabulary (using flash-cards or L1 cues) until all are "fluent"; (3) Pattern-Drill, in which students in succession make up their own sentences until fluent, following the sample

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given in the lesson; and (4) Free-Speech, in which students speak on one or two suggested topics. The suggested topics include "order food" for lesson 1, "tell a story" for lessons with narrative structures, and more specific (but still mostly "archetypical") topics later (when telling time, usually just with the number 3, 6, 9, 12, in asymmetric lexical sequencing, the assignment is to tell what people do at different times).

Each of Study-Steps 2-4 takes 5-10 minutes. Step 4 must be carried on with no corrections, in order to ensure that students are in fact practicing spontaneous speech. The purpose of Study-Step 4 is to ensure that students are in fact speaking on their own. Steps 2-3 can incorporate as much correction as the teacher wishes, so they are the main instrument of "quality control." In some contexts it is better to limit corrections to one per turn per student: In workshops for phobic adults, students may walk out when more is attempted. But certainly it is possible for a more accuracy-oriented teacher, especially in regular academic classrooms, to push for more accuracy. The only general rule is that correction must be done before, not during, Study-Step 4, so as to ensure confident, continuous, creative speech. (General feedback on fluency is allowed, but it is important not to turn Study-Step 4 into the all-too-typical typical post-mortem, so teachers must collect, not correct, errors that occur during this Step.)

"Study-Step 1" presents vocabulary via associations, such as "Kay so like CHEESE" for Spanish queso "cheese." These are far more effective than any other method (including oral practice, diacritics, and tapes) for ensuring comprehensible pronunciation. Almost all learners like them (sooner or later) — although most teachers hate them; in any case, learners who can't use them (e.g. because of a different L1) can easily by-pass them. They are the most noticeable aspect of SILL lessons, and a lightning-rod for critical comments — but, as implied here, a rather secondary part of the method, although admittedly typical of the no-holds-barred approach to teaching spontaneous speech. (It is vital for them to be prepared beforehand, although with intermediate classes in which this is not possible, they can be divided up for students to invent without massive waste of time.)

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Other Aspects

Comprehension in SILL is taught in special SKIP-COMPREHENSION exercises, exemplified on the web-site (and in the appendix). The basic insight behind skip-comprehension is that the learner must learn to hear "not words but ideas" (in the words of one learner), and this means ignoring vast numbers of unknown words. In mainstream courses with input orientation, students do hear some unknown words; but there is no specific program to help them deal with problem of doing so, and they may later limit themselves to more comprehensible material. This is especially the case with the larger issue of authentic materials: While it is true that learners must ultimately deal with authentic materials, they must, more crucially, be able to deal with them in an authentic way. The "skill" of reading with a dictionary (even if learnable in three semesters) is of limited use in real life, and ordinary newspapers and magazines do not come with glossaries.

While in California schools reading materials are required to achieve a minimum recognition rate of 95%, in SILL the maximum recognition rate even at the beginning is 50%, so as to ensure that, however many words learners do or don't know, they will be used to dealing with new material in an authentic way. Vocabulary exercises and even sentence-by-sentence translation are allowed (although recommended for no more than 50% of readings) after students have read all they can on their own — but they must start with summaries and independent reading, without dictionaries or any teacher help.

How does the method "feel" in the classroom? The videos on the second web-site linked to the web-site cited give a good idea: They are minimally different from actual SILL classes, although shortened. They show the four Study-Steps for various languages, with the rhythm appropriate to them. Some teachers will find them mechanical, no doubt, but they do the job best that way, overcoming bashfulness while getting students into active participation; teachers should also look at the sample of how not to teach (which SILL teachers say makes them wince, as they recall how they used to teach).

INTERMEDIATE STUDY.

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Most of the videos show elementary classes, to demonstrate the Study-Steps clearly. The intermediate speaking lessons are essentially the same — only much longer, because of review words and the much longer utterances produced. Hebrew videos #2 show such a later speaking class. The lesson was in no way simulated, and no parts are hidden. The speech is spontaneous, continuous, and enjoyed by the participants. It does exhibit errors, but is completely comprehensible, and exhibits personal involvement in content, as students accuse their classmate of stealing various things — including a boyfriend.

The Hebrew videos #3 show a small part of a skip-reading lesson — the initial part, in which students first find words they know (a small percentage of the total words), and then create a first tentative "summary" of the reading. This would be followed by small-group cooperative intensive reading, still without glossary, and then vocabulary study as a last step.

A major feature of SILL, especially on intermediate levels, is the teaching of SHORTCUTS.

Any teacher might ask: If I were to study a new language (say, Hebrew), whether out of idle interest or for a language requirement (the typical reasons for language study), would I want to learn all of the grammar with little speaking? Or even more relevantly: Should I want to learn it in such a way? Wouldn't I want to learn the bare minimum of grammar to express myself in spontaneous speech comprehensibly — and even somewhat accurately, to the extent that this would not interfere with speaking? Would I want to be so diligent about learning the future or plural or infinitive or imperative (all far more difficult than in Western languages) that I would frequently stop in conversation and ask about the correct form, or vacillate, or even just hesitate? Or would I want to have available a SHORTCUT that would allow me, when necessary, to avoid any of these without actual error (e.g. every + SINGULAR instead of PLURAL — or at least with optimal error?

How many tenses do I need to know — and how many can I actually master? There is no point to learning more than I can master, simply to fumble more and feel more guilty. If you suggest the "three main tenses," I would ask: What about the

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conditional, not to mention subjunctive? When needed, either of these is just as "crucial" to meaning as any other tense.

Nouns in Russian have six case forms (like the articles of German): Should anyone unable to master all six be ejected from Russian classes? For that matter, should the Japanese be disallowed to study English if they can't master the r/l distinction or articles?

The principle of ASYMMETRIC SEQUENCING actually answers this question definitively: This principle always forces SILL curriculum to start with a single form (whether an inflectional form, or a phoneme, or a contrasting vocabulary item), and build up others slowly, one at a time. Those who master 5 forms out of 6 will be more accurate than those who master just 2 — but even those who master only the first form will have the ability to communicate comprehensibly, via OPTIMAL ERRORS (in fact this is quite adequate for tourist purposes).

Every student will, at some point, have to "plateau" with respect to inflection, and to a lesser extent vocabulary. That is, they make a decision to speak more confidently with less than the native complement of tenses or case-forms. This is a reflection of the fact that no adult L2 learner can ever be like a native-speaker. Certainly it is most clearly true in the most important area: vocabulary. No L2 learner can speak spontaneously with the 15,000-20,000 words that native-speakers command.

It may be noted that the heavy speaking focus of elementary SILL cannot and should not be so intensively maintained through later semesters, so there is more room for abundant comprehension materials and even grammar. But to maintain and, especially, to expand the speaking abilities gained in the initial use of SILL, it is important to have 3-5 speaking lessons per week (depending on the language). A speaking vocabulary of about 1,000 words for Spanish is quite possible, with a thousand or more other words known well enough for comprehension — although not the several thousand words of mainstream courses.

Special INTERMEDIATE HANDOUTS have been developed for intermediate classes, to allow them to consolidate their speaking vocabulary, create their own "talking dictionary" lessons (conforming to SILL, but using other textbooks or word-lists as the

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vocabulary source), and using any texts as material for skip-comprehension. These handouts can be used to guide independent learning, using mainstream textbooks, at any curricular level beyond the mini-course.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH ON SILL

Doing controlled experiments is always a challenge — and never more so than with teaching method: The number of variables is obviously so large as to preclude meaningful direct comparison; the straightforward comparison of multiple classes is probably not a useful goal. In the past, experiments have been done them under less than ideal circumstances. After all, few enough teachers are interested in experimenting with new methods at all — especially a method, like SILL, that requires the teacher to operate in a new way.

Nevertheless, experiments have revealed some interesting patterns. Partly on this basis, it is claimed that SILL shows special benefits for "special-needs" students of various kinds, as well as special languages and special environments (such as distance learning, and especially course delivery via mechanical media). From these experiments, it is further claimed that it provides speaking confidence and command of grammar in speaking and better language-learning abilities as well as fun in learning for many students.

Just as important, they have allowed formulation of classroom experiments that do seem useful, as well as creating minimal disruption. Let us thus outline — and invite — a simple kind of experiment, which fits the recommendation for utilizing the method, for a teacher who wants to try it out, even without a formal experiment.

The class must be modified in the following way: Some initial portion of the course is devoted to the SILL mini-course. The maximum may be determined by the SILL courses available; the Spanish mini-course for example, is seven units long, which can easily be done in about 5 weeks of a standard college course. In any case, an absolute minimum of two weeks is suggested, whether for Spanish or any language, to see effects.

After the selected number of units has been completed in x weeks, the class should survey, within one week (or two), whatever part of the regular class textbook

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would have been covered in x+1 (or x + 2) weeks, with special emphasis on the most important structures (vocabulary and grammar) and communicative topics and tasks covered there. The SILL recommendation would be to continue with the textbook by adapting to the structure of SILL, as specifically described in the teachers' booklet; but the experiment can be carried out even if this is not done.

Students can be surveyed for their attitudes once at the end of the mini-course units, and again several weeks later. This can be any collection of comparative questions — or the form that have been developed (accompanied by a separate teacher's questionnaire for comparison).

The most interesting part of the experiment would be the test of actual abilities, which can be given just once, along with the second survey. The test should contain such standard parts as vocabulary (English-to-L2 translation, not multiple choice, preferably rapid (a maximum of 4 seconds per word), sentence-translation (again English-to-L2, but not rapid), and free speech, especially monologue — or free writing; a topic can be assigned, but it should be open, e.g. tell a story about X. A few students can be tested orally for the experiment, and all of them tested in writing for a grade — but free writing turns out to be a reliable indicator of speaking abilities (although of course most students will do somewhat better in writing).

The interesting aspect of this test is the assignment of the various elements to the mini-course vs. the textbook. While most of the vocabulary would probably overlap, vocabulary must be found that can be attributed to the mini-course only or to the textbook only; the same with structures, although this may be more difficult since in general the textbook will cover all structures covered in the mini-course (and others). In the free speech or free writing, the goal is to assign vocabulary and structures, however informally, to one or the other sources; this is often quite easy, although it is good to be ready for difficult choices (for example, by trying to assign each sentence "predominantly" to one or the other, with as few neutral cases as possible).

SUMMARY

Teachers and scholars are invited to try out such experiments, with or without more help from me. Almost any teacher is guaranteed to feel awkward when trying it out,

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perhaps for several times. But the results will begin to be apparent from the very first time. Two reactions of teachers may be helpful. It is worth noting that Hebrew and German are often taught far more traditionally (and grammatically) than Spanish or French, partly because of the more complex morphology of these languages (and in Hebrew the different writing system).

Here are some comments from teachers who have tried the method.

> *Before I learned to make the students responsible for producing and comprehending the language on their own, I thought this was a crazy idea. But now that I've learned it, I think: How stupid I was not to see! When I teach now, I don't hint and cajole to squeeze out the right answer. What's important is that the students are independent: They speak and comprehend and even learn on their own, without the hesitations and feelings of inadequacy that most students have in foreign languages.*
>
> (Alana Shuster, Hebrew teacher, SDSU and UCSD)

Another teacher made these comments:

> *Here's my three-week progress report on the Mini-Course: I am extremely pleased with the results so far. I think every student (except one) knows every word they've been taught — about 80 at this point; their performance on the two quizzes so far is astounding. They can write "short stories", some of which are truly coherent. Because they know the words, they feel empowered to use them, often in interesting ways. I am enjoying the class immensely (not often the case at elementary level). Attendance is nearly perfect, and normally fairly enthusiastic. I'm no longer a slave to a textbook.*

And a few weeks later the same teacher wrote:

> *I do like getting in the dative/accusative — location/destination distinction; it was a little rocky at first, but the better students now handle*

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> *it with ease, something that my upper level students still stumble over hopelessly (and not a one of the beginners has heard the words "Accusative" or "Dative")... My beginning students [using the German mini-course] have much better speaking skills than the second-year students — no surprise for you! I'm slowing, trying to redo that course to truly emphasize speech, but they've been "scarred" by past experience (by me in some cases) and just can't get many sentences out.* (James Walter, German teacher, Ohio Northern University)

The last comment in particular reveals how SILL is in fact a fairly "grammatical" method; certainly it teaches grammar explicitly, albeit within very heavy restrictions. Basically, the implicit claim of SILL is that "communicative language teaching" (CLT) is too broad an approach to ensure successful teaching, especially with the wide variety of personalities and backgrounds of live teachers. CLT so often consists of broad philosophical pronouncements that classroom teachers often cannot carry out, especially with existing textbooks — especially when a traditional exam (such as the TOEFL) looms as the terminal challenge. Faced with a philosophy that seems to deprecate the teaching of vocabulary and grammar as such, many teachers will lapse into either hypocrisy or cynicism.

SILL provides the means by which both vocabulary and grammar can be effectively integrated into a speaking-oriented course. Where mainstream methods dump a confusing mass of words-in-context on students, and/or dump on them lists of 25-50 words for the next quiz, SILL teaches students ways to learn vocabulary: 5 words at a time; with associations, Word-Quiz, and contextualization in their own creative speech. These are techniques that students can use on their own, although it is best to devote class time to them for maximum success. The pace of 5 words twice per hour is adequate to achieve reasonable goals — although it must be admitted that students cannot acquire for speaking as many words as mainstream courses teach. SILL actually just specializes in a more modest range of vocabulary for speaking, leaving the rest for comprehension.

In grammar, too, SILL specializes in a modest range for speaking. While complete "coverage" of the usual litany is not possible, students will generally do well with

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communicative uses of language and even traditional exams, given the greater confidence they have from speaking CONFIDENTLY, CONTINUOUSLY, CREATIVELY, and COMPREHENSIBLY. Admittedly, they will succeed well enough partly because students, on an average, do not handle grammar very well even (or especially) if it is the focus of study; but isn't this the motivation for communicative language teaching anyway?

SILL allows abundant comprehension material, both from teacher-talk and from a standard textbook, and even abundant grammar, in the form of "pencil-grammar" as early as the second semester.

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APPENDIX A Samples from a mini-course

SSON A1: REQUESTS.

Words are the most important element in a new language. But learn to use them in the simple patterns taught here, starting with the pattern for requesting things.

A "word-play" is a silly sentence that connects the pronunciation of a new word with its MEANING. Say each aloud twice, visualize it, etc.	Learn to say each word fluently— whenever cued by its picture (or its translation).
the tailor drinks TEA; you and the boss are eating MEAT; we preview the FRUIT; evacuate a shah, PLEASE.	teh baSár pri vaqasháh

• Learn words thoroughly!

Make sure you know each word well enough to say it instantly whenever you want to—without any hesitation (much less hemming and hawing). Later, when you can already think in the language, even English translations written out can be a good enough cue.

PICTURES FOR FLASH-CARDS

pri

cherry, orange, & apple

baSar

T-bone on tray with knife & fork

teh

cup of tea with bag

Now practice using the words in the pattern by making up your own sentences —, and then talking on the given topics) and review. (after 6 weeks)

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The form given for "please" is an abbreviation: It is indistinguishable from the full form (be-vaqas'a™') in ordinary speech. •The "Noisy Restaurant": Each learner shouts an order when pointed to. If you don't shout it loud enough to be heard, you have to repeat it louder!	sample for Pattern-Drill: teh, vaqashàh! topics for "Free Speech": Order something. (Stick to the pattern: To order two things, use two sentences!)

Can you say each of the following words instantly? Practice until fluent.

Dad, doctor*, man, Mom, woman,	friend, teacher !, king, queen, you-Masc., you-Fem.	is singing* is standing up* is coming* resides*	is taking out* is buying* is drinking* sees*	meat, fish, chicken, rice, bread, milk garment,hat, dress, clock, watch	fruit, berries, apricot,tea , coffee,win emilk, bottle
this is, there there isn't any, there is	son, daughter, brother, sister, policeman, family,	is receiving* is giving* is eating* is wearing*	is speaking is working* is writing* is sitting*	cake, egg, flat-bread money, shekkel, hour 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 100, 1000	with, in, at, on from, to, of tomorrow in the future yesterday, in the past, was
Rebecca Sarah, Rachel Jacob, Moses, David	good*, new*, beautiful*, big*, kosher* rich*, sick*, strange*, alive*	garden, park, tree,market, bank,chair, car,bus,house café, school, party	book, newspaper, magazine gift,medicine map, joy, peace, war, quiet, luck	please, thanks, you're welcome yes, no, not hello, goodbye with joy	America, Russia, Israel, Japan Hebrew, Arabic, American, Israeli, Russian, Japanese

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Can you say a sentence with each? Practice thinking of topics on your own by picking a word at random and saying 3-4 or more sentences using it. Practice the "Talkathon" often.

Write a short "story. Write as much as you can.. Give it a title and one-sentence summary in English.

A. Guests.

Use the context: Guests are asking for food and drink. You don't have to know how they're asking, just what they're asking for. Write down the word in English as you hear it.

1. atah yakhol lehavi' prusat baSar
   im atah panuy.

2. ani eshteh kos teh im zeh lo' yafri"a.

3. en lekha bamiqreh pri kolshehu?

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